

Active Bystander Intervention

One of the most effective methods of preventing sexual assault is bystander intervention. What is Active Bystander Intervention?

This approach encourages people to identify situation that might lead to a sexual assault and then safely intervene to prevent an assault from occurring.

Active Bystander Intervention discourages victim blaming by switching the focus of prevention to what a community of people can do collectively.

The approach also allows for a change in cultural expectations by empowering everyone to say or do something when they see inappropriate or harmful behavior.

This method of intervention places the responsibility of sexual assault prevention on both men and women.

How to Intervene

There are three components to Active Bystander Intervention.

- Recognizing when to intervene.
 - Some people might be concerned that they are being encouraged to place themselves in jeopardy to stop crimes in progress. This is not the case. There are many situation and events that occur prior to a sexual assault that are appropriate for intervention. Active bystander intervention encourages people to watch for those behaviors and situations that appear to be inappropriate, coercive, and harassing.
- Considering whether the situation needs attention.
 - The Department of Defense has chosen to link “duty” with sexual assault prevention. Service members need to understand that it is their moral duty to pay attention to situations that put their friends and co-workers at risk.
- Deciding if there is a responsibility to act.
 - A great deal of research has been done to understand the conditions that encourage people to get involved. There are situational factors that influence a person’s willingness to act. These include the presence of other witnesses, the uncertainty of the situation, the apparent level of danger or risk to the victim, and the setting of the event. Personal characteristics of the bystander also contribute to a decision to act.

Help Someone You Know

When choosing what form of assistance to use, there are a variety of ways to intervene. Some of them are direct, and some of them are less obvious to the perpetrator.

- Making up an excuse to get the potential victim out of a potentially dangerous situation.
- Letting a friend or co-worker know that his or her actions may lead to serious consequences.

- Never leaving the victim's side, despite the efforts of someone to get the victim alone or away from you.
- Using a group of friends to remind someone behaving inappropriately that his/her behavior should be respectful.
- Taking steps to curb someone's use of alcohol before problems occur.
- Calling the authorities when the situation warrants.

Understanding How to Safely Implement the Choice

Safety is paramount in active bystander intervention. Usually, intervening in a group is safer than intervening individually. Also, choosing a method of intervention that de-escalates the situation is safer than attempting a confrontation. However, there is no single rule that can account for every situation. Service members must use good judgment and always put safety first.

Footnotes

1. Information on Bystander Intervention was provided by the Department of Defense Assault Prevention and Response Office from: www.sapr.mil